





Soul-Liberty :

—A—

HISTORICAL POEM.

BY

Rev. Frederic Denison.

“Enfranchisement blazed on her banner.”



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Soul-Liberty.

(Inscribed to STEPHEN RANDALL, ESQ., the
indefatigable conservator of the memories of
ROGER WILLIAMS.)

BY REV. F. DENISON.

Athwart the dark, tumultuous ages,
Divinely sped, truth wins its way,
Discerned and heralded by sages—
Appointed prophets of their day ;—

Spirits elect, as kingly mountains,
The first celestial smiles to greet,
And slake their thirst from heavenly fountains,
The earth in shadows at their feet.

But when the cloud-veil rends asunder,
What splendors crowned the mountain brow,
Like visions fall, and fill with wonder
The dwellers in the vales below.

And oft concealed from ken of mortals
Are treasures in the wondrous earth;
But time unbars the mystic portals,
And brings the priceless jewels forth.

Perhaps awhile despised the treasure,
As some ill-starred, ill-freighted thing,
Till human needs shall gauge its measure,
And human weal its triumphs sing.

To-day soul-freedom wins devotion,
As to some new-born truth men bowed;
Yet such was ever Rhody's notion,
Though ill-received when first avowed.

Whilom, from Bay-State doors ejected,
Alone through wintry wilds she fled,
By Priest and Levite disrespected,
By red-browed pagans cheered and fed.

By Heaven's anointing consecrated,
She pledged her refuge in the wood
Forever sacred dedicated
To truth and human brotherhood.

Her trust in Providence unshaken,
Her charter Inspiration's page,
Assured the truth would yet awaken
Mankind to claim their heritage;—

As when the day-king's glories vernal,
First kindle on the Northern hills—
A prophecy, and beam supernal,
That through earth's bosom sends its thrills.

Enfolding in her heart of kindness,
All men—barbarians and saints;
Allowing for man's native blindness,
Employing only truth's constraints.

In sorest trials, never shirking
The services to state-ship due,
Whose captain should command the working.
But not the worship, of the crew.

Alone to state-control assigning
The watch of morals, wealth, and life;
The will and strength of all combining,
Promoting peace, preventing strife.

Redeeming worship from its prison
Where magistracy held the keys;
Trusting the promised light had risen,
To overmatch apostacies.

Depending on the Spirit given,
Of God, upon the inner shrine,
Wherewith false faiths have vainly striven,
As Dagon with the ark divine.

To such high fellowship exalted,
She bowed not to a shrine of state,
Nor in her sacred mission halted,
Her trusting heart with hope elate.

Unaliened rights in firm possession
She conscious held, as gift from God,
To whom alone she made confession,
Beneath whose shield she meekly stood.

Like rights to savages conceded,
Whose lands with honest price she bought,
Whose human rank she nobly pleaded,
Whose highest interests she sought.

With old Canonicus unfearing
She sat beneath the wigwam's roof,
The pipe of peace their bosoms cheering,
Of brotherhood the chosen proof.

Her hearth-flame free to all her neighbors,
She never drew her latch-string in,
Inviting all to share her labors,
And equal social honors win.

Binding no conscience of another
Of rights she asked and gave the same,
Counting each honest man a brother,
However he pronounced his name—

Or Puritan, or broad-brimmed Quaker,
Or Churchman, fond of book and bands,
Allowing all to serve their Maker,
As they translated his commands.

Not unaware that some abuses
Might spring with the untrameled right,
Serene she met all such excuses
With faith in truth's superior might;—

As oaks indeed are slow in growing,
While thorns quick lift their heads on high,
Yet oaks, at last, broad shadows throwing,
Leave bramble-growths to pale and die.

She felled her forests, turned her furrows,
Unstinting sowed the goodly seed,
And "Digged" the Fox "out of his Burrowes,"
But reared no fence of human creed.

Of old-times practices punctilious,
Her enemies maligned her name,
And, in their manners supercilious,
Found but occasions for her blame;

Unduly scrupulous they thought her,
For following Holy Writ so close;—
Her churches using so much water,
Yet holding churchly reins so loose;

Chagrined because she gave the people,
As by permission from the Lord,
The right to pray outside a steeple—
A license that they much abhorred.

Themselves they counted apostolic,
The keys of Heaven were in their hand;
Dissenting souls were diabolic,
Fore-doomed as outcasts of the land.

Thus copying from the laws of Moses,
They fused in one both church and state,
Prescribing allopathic doses
To those who failed to pay the "rate."

In Boston and in Saybrook, bravely
They reared ecclesiastic forts,
And, in their saintly wisdom, gravely
Protruded *canons* from the ports;—

Grim instruments of Roman forging
In smithies of that valiant age
When converts were secured by scourging,
And fagots fed a holy rage;

Ord'nance, politico-religious,
Full charged with thunder of the State,
For hurling shot and shell prodigious
Against each non-conformist's pate.

But every *canon* burst on firing,
Upturning platforms and the fort,
The frightened *canoniers* retiring
With speed that made their breathing short.

Zealous for creeds and formularies,
Ecclesiastics robed in law,
And righteous civil dignitaries,
A strange and dread hand-writing saw.

To quell the direful fears begotten,
They raised a clamor mid the throng,
And filled their ears with Reverend Cotton,
To keep their tender ear-drums strong.

Not few, inflamed with phrases aptest
Their pious learning could command.
Styled Rhody Familist and Baptist,
Intending for her cheek a brand:

Defending well their sacred union,
Where they controlled the outs and ins,
Uniting state and church communion,
Decreeing Christ and Cæsar twins;

Certain that only through their glasses
Men saw the Lord, or saw his church;
Whoever trod Mount Zion's passes,
Must wear the signet of their search.

The while, with prejudiced intentions,
For her free limbs they forged their gyves,
She, by her generous interventions,
Saved them from whetted scalping knives.

With threats and prayers they oft besought her
To quit her rigid scripture-view,
To cross her brow with holy water,
And have her children sprinkled too;

Thus, by the church regenerated,
Affairs would wear a happier face;—
The church would be more venerated
That thus monopolized all grace;

To sacrifice her soul-convictions
To their grand idol—unity—
The gilded god whose maledictions
Control the blind community;—

Whose dread anathemas can supple
Each human joint from neck to knees,
And bow each conscientious scruple,
Just as the ruling church may please.

Well Rhody pondered all these notions,
Retrimmed her fire, re-sung her psalm,
And, though annoyed in her devotions,
Through faith preserved her spirit calm:

Aware they purposed to oblige her
To leave the right—by them deemed schism—
Yet firm she stood, like good Elijah,
On whom the Lord bestowed his **chrism**:

Since prophets rarely reap much honor
Among their kin, and in their day;
Truth has reproaches cast upon her;
Because reprov'd, wrong hates her sway.

Enfranchisement blazed on her banner;
A bold-wrought Anchor graced her shield:
Around her fell the heaven-sent manna;
And Hope the promised land revealed

Befriending unsectarian knowledge,
And freest culture of the mind,
She gave her soil to found a college—
The first on earth of such broad kind ;—

Patron of sciences and letters,
Mother of goodly tastes and art,
Without ecclesiastic fetters,
Yet glowing with a Christian heart;—

Pure as the air God breathed around her
From ocean waves and wooded heights;
Free as the grace wherewith he crowned her,
She held aloft impartial rights.

Such school, most said, would soon diminish,
As snow before the mid-day sun;
But still it wears its Brown-front finish—
Fit proof the work was wisely done.

Through wars and peace, and changing seasons,
Thus Rhody and her doctrine lived,
And notwithstanding hates, and treasons,
And ill reports, has greatly thrived.

Despite the taunts and jeers, courageous
In hope she toiled, yet spoke her thought:
At last her views became contagious,
And marvelous conversions wrought;

Their power, akin to holy leaven,
Uplifting every candid soul;
Their mission, by the will of Heaven,
The thrones of earth to yet control.

E'en now how changed, in States and nation;
The truth, despised when poor and lone,
Grand theme of poem and oration,
A hemisphere is proud to own.

Aye, Rhody's small and bleak plantations
Have grown to be an honored state:
Fair orb amid earth's constellations—
By her sublime ideas made great.

Of liberty, to-day her notions
Forth march in songful, conquering might,
O'erpassing mountain peaks and oceans,
Benignant as celestial light.

The old-time heresy has proven
Of such superior, heaven-owned worth,
That men now pray it interwoven
With codes designed to span the earth.

Lo! Williams, once in detestation
Cast out, like the apostle John,
Is now by joyous acclamation
Enshrined in Freedom's Pantheon.

For him, a stately shaft of granite
Shall yet crown Rhody's Prospect Hill,
Where millions shall delight to scan it,
And catch the soul-inspiring thrill.

Strange! e'en his bones, in dust reposing,
Assumed a living form and aim,—
Heaven's fitting deed of wondrous choosing
To symbolize his deathless name.

His faithful compass, still surviving,
True, as his conscience, to its pole,
Type of the secret power and thriving
Of his pure doctrines of the soul.

Of streams that bless or vale or mountain,
Whereof the tongue may thankful sing,
The land boasts not a sweeter fountain
Than cool and sparkling Williams' Spring.

And What-Cheer Rock, like Patmos-island,
Trode by the lonely exile's feet,
Is counted as a moral highland—
Its fragments e'en for jewels meet.

Yea, world-wide stirs the great discussion
For re-constructing thrones and shrines—
Asiatic, Mexic, Afric, Russian,
Unfolding grand millennial signs;

When souls shall be, each one, a temple;
Each conscience—consecrated priest;
Messiah—Savior, King, Example;
The nations from their yokes released.

Thank God! His truth-seeds are eternal;
Though buried through the ages long,
There comes, at last, the season vernal,
And, in the end, the harvest song.

For truth stand firm, then, honest toilers;
Success shall crown what Heaven inspires;
The right is mightier than despoilers;
True gold withstands the furnace fires.

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